UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/ICEF/1997/18
13 May 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
Annual session 1997
2-6 June 1997
Item 11 of the provisional agenda*

FOR ACTION

UNESCO/UNICEF JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Report on the sixth meeting held in Bucharest, Romania, on 5-6 May 1997

SUMMARY

The present report contains the recommendations of the fifth meeting of the UNESCO/UNICEF Joint Committee on Education of the Executive Boards of UNICEF and UNESCO, which was held in Bucharest, Romania, on 5-6 May 1997.

* E/ICEF/1997/13.

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1. At the invitation of the Government of Romania, the sixth (first extraordinary) meeting of the UNESCO/UNICEF Joint Committee on Education (JCE) was held in Bucharest from 5 to 6 May 1997.

2. At the opening session, the outgoing chairperson, Mr. E. Akinluyi (Nigeria), stressed that there was a laudable synergy in the cooperation between UNESCO and UNICEF. He urged that such action and complementarity be made even more vibrant and fine tuned. Welcoming statements were made by H.E. Dr. Virgil Petrescu, Minister of Education of Romania, as well as by Dr. Mercedes Pulido de Briceño (Venezuela) in her capacity as President of the Executive Board of UNICEF.

3. The meeting elected Dr. Mercedes Pulido de Briceño as its chairperson, and Mr. M. Makagiansar (Indonesia) and Mr. Sam A. Otuyelu (Nigeria) as joint rapporteurs.

4. Addressing the Committee, the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Director-General of UNESCO stressed the continued commitment of the two agencies to close cooperation, with tangible achievements on the ground, in pursuit of the goals of Education for All (EFA), which 155 countries had solemnly adopted in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990.

5. The EFA Mid-Decade Conference in Amman was seen as a major milestone in the global EFA movement. Committee members noted that Amman had provided evidence of the quantitative gains made since Jomtien in raising enrolment rates, curbing the number of illiterates and significantly reducing the number of school-age children without access to education. At the same time, the Committee was mindful of the huge and diverse educational challenges which countries and the international community would confront in the remaining years of the decade.

6. The Committee then undertook a review of UNESCO/UNICEF cooperation since its fifth meeting in May 1996, considered future collaborative initiatives and adopted the recommendations below.

7. In her closing comments, the Chairperson of JCE expressed the Committee's thanks to the Romanian authorities for their warm hospitality. The outcomes of this meeting, she observed, strengthen her confidence that the two organizations would continue to pursue joint action at country level, accepting the challenge to be imaginative and constructive in the face of an increasingly complex and diverse educational context.

Recommendations

8. As close partners in the broad alliance that was established at Jomtien, and as leaders in the International Consultative Forum on EFA, UNICEF and UNESCO must maintain their contribution to monitoring global progress towards EFA. It is desirable that they continue to set an example for effective cooperation among United Nations agencies.

9. Within this context, JCE recommends that:

(a) Collaborative work be focused on the following principles:

(i) Greater attention to the implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(ii) Commitment to activities that can make a measurable difference to EFA and which reflect national priorities;

(iii) Greater focus and programme concentration on selected areas of cooperation;

(iv) Increased decentralization of activities, with an emphasis on the country level;

(v) Effective utilization of mutual strengths, resources and complementarity;

(b) The areas of focus should be:

(i) Educational opportunities for girls and women, with particular emphasis on working with non-governmental organizations and a commitment to serious discussion between the two organizations on the topic and how they can collaboratively address this critical priority;

(ii) The development of reliable, credible, timely and gender-disaggregated country-level educational data on the progress towards achievement of EFA. This should involve support for UNESCO's broader responsibility for global-level education data as well as the promotion of capacity-building and system development at country level;

(iii) Education quality and learning achievement, with particular attention to the learning experience. This should include a responsive definition of learning achievement, assessment of "lessons learned" and fostering incorporation of these lessons in national policies;

(iv) The ongoing collaboration on education in emergencies and for reconstruction. The two organizations should engage in a process of synthesizing and learning from best practices, further develop aspects of the role of education in promoting understanding and acceptance of diversity, and explore ways to permit a more timely emergency response;

(v) The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, which remains a very high priority for both organizations. UNESCO and UNICEF should continue to be key players with other partners in the Initiative, not neglecting countries which do not immediately have Sector Investment Programmes in place;

(vi) Enhancing the learning opportunities of all children by considering the status, rewards for and motivation of teachers and paraprofessionals, including their training. This effort should include community responses to educational shortage;

(c) The seventh meeting of JCE will be held in 1999 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.